

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9019

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TAGS: PINS, PBOR, IS, JO

SUBJ: LIKUD INTENTIONS TOWARDS ISLAMIC SITES

1. CITING COMMENTS OF PM RABIN ON ISRAELI TELEVISION, EAST JERUSALEM'S LEADING ARABIC DAILY AL QUDS MAY 26 EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT A LIKUD GOVERNMENT'S POLICY TOWARDS ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS SITES, SPECIFICALLY THE HARAM AL IBRAHIMI (MACHPELA CAVE) IN HEBRON AND HARAM ESH SHARIF (TEMPLE MOUNT) IN JERUSALEM.

"THE HARAM AL IBRAHIMI NOW AND UNDER A LABOR GOVERNMENT BECAME ESSENTIALLY A SYNAGOGUE AND PERIPHERALLY A MOSQUE. DESPITE THAT, THE LIKUD WAS NOT SATISFIED AND DEMANDED, AS THE OPPOSITION, INCREASED RESTRICTIONS ON THE FREEDOM OF MUSLIM WORSHIP."

"AS FOR THE HARAM ESH SHARIF, THE LABOR POLICY SPECIFIED THAT JEWS HAVE A PERFECT RIGHT TO ENTER AND PRAY ANYWHERE THEREIN, HOWEVER THIS RIGHT COULD BE RESTRICTED IF ITS PRACTICE, IN
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THE JUDGEMENT OF POLICE, THREATENED SECURITY."

"THIS POLICY, DESPITE MUSLIM OBJECTIONS, WAS ATTACHED AND CRITICIZED BY THE LIKUD AS THE OPPOSITION."

"NOW THE OPPOSITION WILL GOVERN AND IMPOSE ITS POLICIES ON THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, FOREMOST OF THEM, THE

ISLAMIC HOLY SITES. HENCE, RABIN'S QUESTION: WILL THE FUTURE GOVERNMENT NOW APPLY WHAT IT HAS BEEN DEMANDING AS THE OPPOSITION?"

2. COMMENT: MAJOR CAUSE OF THE SPRING 1976 RIOTS ON THE WEST BANK WAS THE RULING OF A JERUSALEM MAGISTRATE THAT JEWS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO PRAY ON THE TEMPLE MOUNT, NOW THE SITE OF THE HARAM ESH SHARIF, AND THE REPEATED ATTEMPTS BY MEMBERS OF BETAR (A HERUT YOUTH MOVEMENT) LED BY LIKUD CITY COUNCILMEN TO DO JUST THAT. AFTER LONG DELAYS THE ISRAELI SUPREME COURT RULED THAT THE POLICE COULD INDEED FORBID JEWISH PRAYER ON THE TEMPLE MOUNT IN THE INTEREST OF MAINTAINING ORDER. SOME LIKUD MEMBERS ARGUED, UNSUCCESSFULLY AT THE TIME, THAT POLICE SHOULD MAINTAIN ORDER WITH A STRONG SECURITY PRESENCE AND REGULATIONS GOVERNING TIMES AND PLACES FOR PRAYER. IRONICALLY, AND TRANSGRESSION OF THE TEMPLE MOUNT IS ADAMANTLY REJECTED BY MANY ORTHODOX JEWS. HENCE, CONCEIVABLY, PARTICIPATION BY THE ULTRA-ORTHODOX RELIGIOUS PARTIES IN THE GOVERNING COALITION COULD "MODERATE" LIKUD'S PAST INCLINATION.

3. IN HEBRON, GUSH EMUNIM ACTIVISTS AT KIRYAT ARBA HAVE PRESSED HARD FOR AN INCREASED JEWISH PRESENCE AT THE SITE OF THE MACHPELA CAVE AS WELL AS FOR THE PRAYERS IN RUINS OF THE AVRAHAM AVINU SYNAGOGUE IN THE FORMER JEWISH QUARTER. THE LATTER SITE WHICH HAS BEEN CLEARED AND FENCED IS INCONVENIENTLY LOCATED RIGHT BESIDE THE CENTRAL VEGETABLE MARKET. SEVERAL SECULAR SITES ARE ALSO CLAIMED BY THE GUSH IN THE CENTER OF HEBRON WHERE THEY HAVE ANNOUNCED A LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DESIRE TO SETTLE.

4. IN LATER DEVELOPMENT, JERUSALEM POST MAY 27 REPORTS THAT LIKUD, AFTER INTERNAL DISCUSSIONS, HAS DECIDED TO REJECT SUGGESTIONS FROM SOME PARTY MEMBERS TO TAKE TOUGHER STANCE TOWARDS ARABS IN BOTH ISRAEL AND WEST BANK. IN EFFECT, STROY SAYS THAT LIKUD WILL MAINTAIN STATUS QUO REGARDING HOLY SITES IN JERUSALEM AND HEBRON.
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